

Moderating a Panel

Moderating a panel of patients, patient advocates and stem cell experts can be daunting. Below are some key tips and tricks that can guide you toward a successful panel.

Know the Audience

Knowing who the audience is—and what they hope to get out of the event —will help you shape a lively, engaging and informative discussion.

- Ask yourself the following when picking the perfect panel:
- What is the audience coming to learn about?
- What is the audience's connection to the topic?
- Is the audience already informed, or do they know very little and want to learn?

Do Your Homework

Be sharp, and be focused.

- Take the time to think about the goals for the panel, what you hope it will achieve;
- Research the latest news about this issue so it can be as timely and topical as possible;
- and Plan out how you will introduce the panel and the panelists so that you neatly let the audience know who and what they are about to hear.

Get the Right Balance

When choosing panel members, make sure you have a balanced group, not just in terms of their views and expertise, but also in terms of gender and ethnicity. The topic under discussion may limit your options in terms of who you can invite but always make an effort to have balance.

SIDENOTE: For years Patient Advocates were kept on the outside of scientific discussions, even if those discussions were about therapies that could help them. It's important to bring as many different voices to the table as possible. Think of it as a dinner party, you want a good mix of guests who will make the evening enjoyable and engaging.

Practice, Practice, Practice

- Prepare the panelist introductions and send them to each panelist for approval.
- Keep those introductions short. Your role is to establish quickly who they are and why they are on the panel and then move on.
- Prepare questions that you can ask to the panel as a whole and questions to individual members of the panel.
- Each question should have a purpose and should move the conversation forward. You can throw in a few provocative questions too if things are likely to get tame, but don't aim those at any one individual or it will look as if you are ganging up on them.
- Decide in advance whether to have audience questions, and plan ahead how to handle those.

Do you want a microphone in the middle of the room for people to line up at and speak in to when it's their turn?

OR

Do you want to hand out cards for people to fill in and for you to sift through during question time?

Knowing how you are going to handle this part of the event removes another note of uncertainty.

Make Time Ahead of Time

- Schedule a conference call with all the panel members *before* the event.

- During the call, lay out the timeline for the event, including how long each person will have for his or her opening remarks.
- Tell them what kinds of questions you are likely to ask. Let them know if you'll be opening it up to questions from the audience so they can be prepared for some potentially hostile questions.
- Tell them what the goals of the event are, what you hope to get out of it, and what their roles will be.
- Give them a chance to throw out ideas and have others react. This will help the panel to get a sense of you and of the other members. It may even help identify some chemistry between members.

Check the Site

- Get to the event early, around 60 minutes before it starts. This gives you a chance to get a feel for the space and check that the microphones and any audiovisual equipment are working.

TIP: You would be amazed how often equipment you thought would be available—such as a projector, or even a computer—either isn't there or doesn't work. Getting there ahead of time allows you to correct those problems or come up with some creative solution.

Have the Panel Arrive Early

- Just as it is helpful for you to get there ahead of time to make sure everything is in place and working, the same is true for the panelists.
- This gives them time to settle in, to make sure their presentations (if they have one) are loaded onto the computer, to get tea/coffee/water etc. and if necessary, to visit the bathroom.
- Most of all it lets the panelists get comfortable with each other.

Watch, Listen and Learn

When panelists are talking, listen carefully and take notes. You can use these later to ask questions, framing the question in their own words.

Keep an eye on time; too many moderators let speakers ramble on and on. Don't be afraid to jump in and try to move the conversation along.

TIP: Have some phrases ready to handle those situations, things like *"That's a great point Mary and it's a nice segway to our next question"* or *"We'll come to you in a minute Joe, but let's hear from Anne first."* Preparing these ahead of time will make it easier to jump in when you need to and keep the conversation moving.

- **Ask follow-up questions** if you think the panelist dodged the first one or if you feel the audience wants to know more.
- **Throw in something provocative** if the conversation is starting to get dull. If the panelists are all being nice turn to the audience to get them to shake things up a little; ask things like *"Who doesn't agree with what Mike just said?"*

Share the Load

- Your job as moderator is to keep the conversation moving along in a lively manner towards your goal.
- If the panel members are doing a great job of that on their own, don't feel the need to jump in just to add your voice to the conversation—it's going along perfectly well without you.

Enjoy Yourself

- Panels are meant to be fun so try to and enjoy it. This doesn't mean you have to tell jokes to keep the mood light; as long as people leave feeling they have learned something and had an informative, engaging time, then you've succeeded.
- Learn from your mistakes. Being a good moderator is a skill, and like other skills it takes practice. The more you do it the better you'll be.

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